**Caveat Quaestor**

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/227595.

**Rating:**
Teen And Up Audiences

**Archive Warning:**
No Archive Warnings Apply

**Category:**
M/M

**Fandom:**
Suits (TV)

**Relationship:**
Mike Ross/Harvey Specter

**Language:**
English

**Stats:**
Published: 2011-07-24 Words: 8,236 Chapters: 1/1

# Caveat Quaestor

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Summary

Mike has a tattoo. Harvey *needs* to know what it is.

Notes

Originally written as a fill for this prompt over at the kinkmeme. Also posted here at my LJ.

Disclaimer: Not mine. USA Network's. ALAS. T___T

If it hadn't been for Louis, Harvey never would have found out. Because Louis is the one who makes off with the files for the Leavington merger, which leads Harvey to believe Mike hasn't finished reviewing them yet, which in turn leads him to invade Mike's cubicle just in time to hear Rachel say,

"—like it. It's a nice bit of ink."

"Yeah, well, thanks," Mike mutters, looking away. Then he spots Harvey. "Hey, what's up?"

"You have ink?" When Mike just gapes at him, Harvey frowns and turns to Rachel. "He has ink?"

"*Nice* ink," she emphasizes.

"Where?"

"On his chest."

"Of what?"

"Hey!" Mike interrupts. "Stop that! Don't tell him," he adds sternly, pointing at Rachel. She makes a face.

"You're no fun," she complains, but leaves, heels clicking on the floor. Harvey watches her go.

"Did you want me for something?" Mike asks, turning to Harvey. Harvey opens his mouth to reply – and realizes he's completely forgotten.

"Just…checking up on you," he says, and hurries after Rachel.

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By the time he catches up with her, Rachel is already ensconced back in her office, clicking away at the law library's online catalogue. She blinks, surprised, when she sees him lounging in her doorway.

"Can I help you?" she asks, a bit uncertainly. Harvey puts on his best *charming the little people* smile.

"I just had a couple of questions that I thought you might be able to answer for me," he says. "First, are you familiar with the Leavington merger?"

Rachel nods.

"I helped Mike draft some of the provisions you assigned him."

"Do you remember the section on capitalization? It would have been in Article III."

"Sure. I have it right – here we go." She pulls up a PDF file. "What do you need to know?"

"How many issues of Company shares did we say would be issued and outstanding as of the capitalization date?"

"Um…one hundred forty-five million, six hundred thirty-three thousand, three hundred thirty-five, at the standard par value of $1.00 per share."

"Great. And how many shares were reserved for issuance or issued and outstanding in the Company Trust?"

"Nineteen million for Company Options, seven and a half million pending the settlement of any RSUs, twenty million pending on the Cap Units, and…two hundred fifty-five thousand pending on the Deferred Equity Units."

"Perfect. And what's the design of Mike's tattoo?"

"A four-inch banner that reads, 'You are not as sneaky as you think you are, Mr. Specter.' "

Harvey laughs, impressed, and wonders how he managed to miss recruiting her for so long.

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Of course, Harvey isn't going to let it go as easily as that. The next time he's in for a fitting, he strikes up a casual conversation with René; nothing unusual, nothing they haven't talked about before.

"How's that new client working out? The one I sent you a couple weeks ago?"

"Michael?" René pins another fold and sighs. "That boy…Harvey, you have to talk to him."

"What? Why?"

"Did he tell you what he said to Veronica?"

"Whatever it was, I'm sure he didn't mean—"

"He asked her," René's voice is filled with suppressed outrage, "if she was going to label the suits *so he could tell which jackets went with which trousers.*"

Harvey winces – and not only because René has just given him a deliberate jab with a pin.

"You should not have sent him here. You should have brought him yourself, and you should have *warned me*," he says sternly.

"…all right, René." Part of being a great closer, after all, is knowing when to stop negotiating. "You're right. I'm sorry."

"Good," René sniffs. "Now, what did you really want to ask me? You've been twitchy all afternoon."

"Did you see what Mike's tattoo looks like?"

"Michael has a tattoo?"

"Yeah, right here," Harvey gestures at his left pectoral and gets another pin in the elbow for his trouble when the motion gets in the way of René finally easing him out of his soon-to-be new suit. "Ouch! How did you miss it?"

"My God, Harvey, I was measuring the boy for a suit, not a spandex leotard. He had his undershirt and trousers on the whole time."

Harvey looks at himself in the fitting room mirror – stripped down to his boxer-briefs, as always – and then at René.

"Oh, darling." René smiles, and pats Harvey's bum affectionately. "We all have to have our little indulgences."

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Harvey's next option sticks in his craw more than he thought it would, but it's still better than going directly to Mike.

"Louis!" he says brightly, swinging into the dimly lit office at the opposite end of his own wing. "Louis, hey, remember that time you stole my associate in the middle of a case and tried to use a faked drug test to manipulate him for your own sordid and twisted ends? And

how you and him were alone together in a locker room at one point, and—"

Louis looks up, eyes narrowed but head cocked inquiringly, his lips pulling back from his teeth in a calculating, murine smile.

"—never mind."

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However unpalatable it might be to actually ask Louis for help, Harvey has far fewer qualms about taking a tactical page out of his book. He did it to nail the false witness in the Hunt case, and he'll damn well do it to get a look at that elusive ink of Mike's, too. Which is why at one o'clock on Thursday afternoon, Harvey intercepts Mike on the way back from lunch and announces,

"Get in the car, we're going to the gym."

"What?" Mike stops so short he almost trips over his own feet.

"It occurs to me, in the wake of our near debacle with Wyatt, that I may been remiss in one area of your education."

"Really?" Mike's eagerness as he all but dives into the car is touching – almost enough so to make Harvey regret what he's about to do next.

"Absolutely. *Boxing.*"

"*What?!*"

When they arrive, Mike takes one look around the dirty, dingy, and generally disgusting locker room and says flatly, "This is revenge, isn't it."

Harvey looks up from stripping out of his suit – vest and all, because yes, even here he has an image to maintain – and frowns. "Revenge for what?"

"For – for the tennis thing! With Louis, and the guy, and not filing the injunction—"

"Oh, please." Harvey strips off his undershirt and hangs it in the closet with the rest, then turns to rummage in his gym bag. "If I were out for revenge, you'd know it. And I certainly wouldn't have brought you to one of the best gyms in the city to do it."

Mike wrinkles his nose. "This place? Really?"

Harvey sighs, though he can't really blame the kid for his skepticism. It isn't much to look at: the floors creak, the vents smell funny, the lighting is dubious at best – and he hasn't even been out into the ring yet. But it's where Harvey got his start, and it gave a weedy scholarship kid at the Bronx High School of Science everything, *everything* he needed to be the kind of man he wanted to be, and Harvey will go as many rounds as it takes with anyone who says there's a better boxing gym anywhere in the Five Boroughs.

He doesn't explain that to Mike, though. Instead, he reaches into his gym bag and pulls out a plastic wrapped bundle.

"—kind of grungy *hey*. What is that?" Mike says warily, interrupting his own ramble. Harvey grins.

"What, you thought I was going to let you wriggle out of this by pleading you don't have boxing gear? Or a gym bag at all, which, really, you might want to look into that, kid – I know you look good *now*, and you bike and all, but—"

Mike's button-down hits him right in the face, and by the time Harvey has disentangled himself, Mike has already fled into a bathroom stall to change. When he emerges, he's wearing the shorts and shoes Harvey bought for him (he only had to guess a little on the sizing; René was wonderfully helpful), but much to Harvey's disappointment, he's still got his undershirt on.

"You know you can't wear that back to the office after sweating in it," Harvey says, trying to sound more stern than disappointed.

"I've got a spare," Mike replies cheerfully. "Started keeping a whole change of clothes in my office, ever since that time I had to borrow your suit." He shudders theatrically, and holds up his new boxing gloves. "Can you show me how to put these on?"

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"I feel like a penguin," Mike complains, waving his hands around ineffectually, as Harvey guides him into the gym proper. "Or an armadillo. Something with stubby paws that can't hold stuff very well. You know, it's kind of like that time I got chicken pox, when I was a kid; Grammy put oven mitts on my hands and oh, man, it was *agony* – hey, did your mom do that? Did you even get chicken pox? Somehow I can't really picture it—"

"Stop babbling, you're just broadcasting to everyone how nervous you are," Harvey says sternly. He's still carrying his own gloves, along with two sets of headgear and a pair of focus mitts.

"What? I'm not nervous, I totally—" Mike takes one look at Harvey's face and stops. "…yeah, okay. I'm nervous."

"Good. Now *stop* being nervous." Harvey guides him over to an isolated corner, where a heavy bag is bolted to the ceiling. "Try hitting that, instead."

For a moment, Mike looks like he's going to argue. Then he plants his feet, squares his shoulders – and hits the bag.

"Ow!"

"Good! Now scoot your left foot forward a bit and try again."

Mike shoots him a baleful look, but obeys. And so it continues.

"Hitch up – your weight should be on the balls of your feet, not your heels."

"Bend your knees, you need to lower your center of gravity."

"Your hips are too square; you're putting strain on your knees. Relax, let the stance flow up naturally from your feet."

"Fists up, elbows in – come on, haven't you ever watch a boxing movie? There has to be something useful rattling around in that head of yours."

"Good Christ, you heard the phrase 'punch from the hip' once and never forgot, didn't you? Stop, stop, before you sprain something."

The gym is kept warm, and there are more than a few other people there; Harvey's already stripped off his shirt, and all he's doing is demonstrating. Mike is practically soaking, dark stains spreading under his arms and across his back. He smells like deodorant, and sweat, and Harvey is a little surprised to realize how badly he wants to just bury his nose in Mike's hair and *inhale*.

Harvey pushes the thought aside – for now – and is nudging Mike out of the way to show him something when a dark, knob-knuckled hand lands heavily on his shoulder.

"Specter." The man Harvey turns around to face is six foot ten if he's

an inch, with tree-trunk limbs and tight, greying curls shorn military short on his head. His skin, the rich black of creamless coffee, is criss-crossed with scars, and his face is worn with age lines from smiles and scowls both. He's scowling now, as he looks Harvey over from head to toe.

"I thought I told you never to step over this threshold again."

"And I thought I told you that was never going to happen."

The man crosses his arms.

Harvey does the same.

Beside him, Harvey can feel the tension practically zinging off Mike – he'll have to do something about that; he can just imagine, now, how the kid was on his first day alone in court – as his gaze flicks between Harvey and the man. Suddenly, the man lunges forward. Mike lunges too, instantly, instinctively protective. While Harvey's grateful for the sentiment, he's also never been more grateful that Mike isn't exactly a fast-twitch, highly athletic kind of guy. The man's arms close around him, and then –

"Harvey Specter, you son of a bitch!" he bellows happily, lifting Harvey clear off the ground in a massive bear hug. "I don't see you for three months, and you waltz your latest bit of sweet in here without even stopping to say hello?"

"Oof! Hey, what can I say?" Harvey laughs, squirming until he's set back on his feet. "That's what making Senior Partner will do to a man's schedule."

"*Senior*—"

"Yep." Harvey beams; here, of all places, he can't – and doesn't want to – hide how he feels. "And this," he gestures at Mike, "is my rookie, Mike Ross."

"Hi," Mike says weakly, still looking a bit shell-shocked. Harvey pats him on the shoulder.

"Mike, meet John Urban, owner and proprietor of Urban's Gym and trainer of some of the best boxers this city has ever seen."

"And how would you know that?" John thumps Harvey on the head with a loose fist, further mussing hair already destroyed by heat and

exertion. "Way I recall it, you were always quicker in the head than the hands, boy. And don't even get me *started* on your footwork—"

"Still quick enough take you on, old man," Harvey laughs, and grabs his gloves.

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The rhythm of the ring comes back to him quickly. Harvey bobs and weaves, slipping in and out of John's enormous reach as they dance over the scuffed canvas. Even inside the deep, familiar focus of *fists-feet-foe-fight*, Harvey can't entirely shake the awareness of Mike's gaze following the shift and bunch of his muscles, that brilliant mind cataloguing every rasp of breath, every drop of sweat, every grunt of effort now slipping out from behind Harvey's everyday mask of control.

When John finally declares them done, citing exhaustion – after landing a head blow that made Harvey's teeth rattle even through the protective gear, and Harvey is man enough to be grateful that John is willing to stop once he's too tired to pull his punches – Harvey ducks under the ropes and drops down onto the floor, right beside Mike. Mike is still staring at him, as though he hasn't quite registered that Harvey isn't concentrating on the match anymore. Harvey feels his face heat, even though he's already flushed from exertion.

"Come on," he says, dragging off his gloves and hauling Mike back toward the locker room. "I need a shower."

To Harvey's dismay, however, even in the showers Mike doesn't completely strip down.

"Poor man's washer/dryer," he explains, completely shameless as he ducks under the spray in his boxers and undershirt. "Used to do it at the Y sometimes, when I had to cut my water bill and Trevor wasn't around."

"All right, but what's your excuse now?"

Mike grins.

"I'm body shy," he says coyly, posing like Botticelli's Venus.

Harvey throws the soap at him.

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At the end of the following week, Jessica calls Harvey into her office and announces,

"I want you to close Kazuo Moritaka for me. You're leaving for Japan on Monday."

Harvey doesn't even blink; he's catered to far more unusual requests, and from far less valuable clients.

"All right. But I'm taking Mike with me." Jessica starts to wave her assent, then pauses.

"Really? Does the kid even speak Japanese, Harvey?"

"He doesn't need to, you know all the negotiations will be in English – Moritaka just wants to sign the deal on his home turf. And Mike," Harvey wets his lips, thinking fast, "Mike has only ever dealt with tricky clients right here, at Pearson Hardman. He needs to learn what it's like to lose that home field advantage."

Jessica arches a skeptical eyebrow at him.

"You know, I think that's the longest explanation you've ever given me. Should I be looking deeper into this rookie, Harvey?"

"What? Of course you should, he brought in his first damn client less than a month after getting hired. And he's *mine*," Harvey adds quickly, pointing a stern finger at her. "So don't you get any ideas besides looking."

"Get out of here, you." But she's smiling as she says it.

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Mike is briefing him on precedent for the Hanover case (copyright, God, Harvey *hates* copyright law; it's too squishy, too hard to catch someone out) when Harvey decides to interrupt him.

"Do you have a passport?"

"—*Nichols v. Universal Pictures*, which is a bit dated, but if we argue that it's a stock character—"

"Hey!" Harvey has to actually wave a hand in front of Mike's face to get his attention. "I said, do you have a passport?"

Mike frowns.

"Why would I need a passport?" he asks. "Geneva Graphics is based in the United States, and even if it weren't, they're suing under US jurisdiction."

"Never mind, the firm can take care of that easily enough." Harvey plows on, taking far too much pleasure in watching Mike try to catch up to him. "You don't speak Japanese, either, do you?"

"Give me a couple weeks and I can probably learn enough to get by – Harvey, what is this about?"

"You've got four days."

"*What?*"

Harvey grins, and rises, and wanders off, wondering how long it will take Mike to figure it out this time.

Just under an hour later, Mike bursts into Harvey's office.

"*Donna?*" Harvey raises his voice, inquiring.

"*Orders!*" she calls back.

"Kazuo Moritaka," Mike says triumphantly, slapping a folder down on Harvey's desk. Harvey can't help smiling, just a little.

"You're improving," he allows. "Or did Donna owe you a favor?"

"Rachel," admits Mike. "But I only asked her to how to find a list of your cases! I did the rest myself."

"Because when I tell you we're going to Japan, it's so difficult to guess that it's probably at the behest of the man named Moritaka."

Mike just sticks his tongue out and looks smug.

After he leaves, Harvey pokes his head out of his office.

"Donna?" he asks. "What was that about orders?"

"Hm? Oh, yes. Jessica told me I'm not allowed to keep Mike out of your office anymore."

"What?!"

"Well, she has a point. The kid doesn't exactly have many options,

unless you want him to start running to Louis."

"Okay, no, I agree that would be bad, but – you don't even listen to what *I* tell you—"

Donna clears her throat meaningfully.

"—I mean, you only listen to what I tell you if it's not excessively amoral, bastardly, or characteristic of the superorder *Selachimorpha*."

"You're the one who let me put it in my contract," she reminds him.

"Yeah, because I didn't want Louis to get to you before I—look, that's not the point." Harvey is starting to get annoyed, and he can tell it's creeping into his voice. "The point is, I have enough problems with Louis breathing down my neck ever since this promotion and a new associate who *no one else* will understand is the best goddamn man for this job, I don't need my boss suborning my secretary—"

"*Harvey Specter.*" Donna says sharply, standing. She spends so much time at her desk, it's easy for Harvey to forget that in her heels she's easily of a height with him. "*Don't you dare.* I am on your side. I have been on your side for seven years, and no one has ever been able to change that. But you can be so hard on that kid, and so can I, and he still worships the ground you walk on." She lowers her voice and lays a hand on Harvey's arm. "He could be so good for you, and don't even want to give him a chance?"

"Hah. Believe me," Harvey's smile is wry, and a little bitter. "He's got a chance, whether I want him to or not."

Donna looks at him hard – and then pulls him into a quick, tight hug.

"Don't fuck up," she says. As Harvey turns to go back into his office she adds,

"Oh, and Harvey?"

"Mm?" he only half turns, expecting another critique.

"I never would have worked for Louis."

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For the next four days, though, Harvey rides Mike harder than ever. Aegis of the firm or no, it still won't look good if they go swanning off to the other side of the globe with a pile of casework still on their

desks. He makes Mike buy a book on the Japanese language, and another on culture, and sends him articles on everything from drinking sake to riding the subway. And yet, it seems there was still one thing he left unaccounted for.

"Oh *man*," Mike breathes, as he steps into the plane cabin and just stares. "This is what flying first class is like?"

"Oh, God," Harvey mutters, and shoves him into his seat. "You're twenty-five years old, I know you've been on a plane before."

"Yeah, once. When you sent me to Harvard," Mike retorts, handing Harvey his carry-on to stow in the overhead bin. "Which, I still don't understand why that was necessary, by the way, it's only like a four hour drive."

"And yet you *still* don't own a car," Harvey points out. He fusses around with the overhead a little longer, then gets stuck when a imperious little old lady nudges him with her cane and "requests" his assistance. It's easier to help than to argue, but by the time Harvey finally sits down, Mike has already turned on the in-flight entertainment system and is blasting away at a horde of zombies, headphones clapped tightly over his ears. Harvey is about to yank the thing out of his hands when Mike pauses it and turns to him with a grin.

"This is awesome!" he enthuses, eyes shining like he's a four-year-old at Christmas. "Why didn't I fly like this last time?"

"Because you're an idiot whose naiveté will only remain charming for so long?"

"So you think I'm charming, huh?" Mike digs Harvey's controller out of the seat pocket and thrusts it into his hands. "Come on, we've got at least another forty minutes before we take off. We can even play co-op, if you want."

Harvey snorts.

"PvP. Only. *Ever*," he says, and logs in.

By the time they take off, Mike is ahead two kills to one, and Harvey is almost grateful for the interruption.

"Whiskey, neat," he orders when the stewardess comes around. Mike is still engrossed in his game, so Harvey adds, "and one for him, too,"

and pretends not to notice when she discreetly checks the roster to verify that Mike is over twenty-one.

Mike polishes his off absently, between kills, but he's perfectly happy to stop playing when their dinners arrive a few hours later – even as he crows about schooling the rest of the plane in deathmatch PvA. So Harvey goes ahead an orders another drink to go with it, and then another.

Ten hours into their thirteen-hour flight, Mike finally starts to flag. He's been up a full eighteen hours, his body is convinced it's ten p.m., and the alcohol is definitely starting to take its toll. Harvey considers prodding him awake – they'll arrive some time around four, Japan time, and if Mike sleeps too much he'll never get over his jet lag – but with Mike passed out on his shoulder, drooling onto one of René's three-thousand dollar suits, he can't bring himself to do it. Instead, he shakes out the complimentary blanket and, one-armed, tucks it around Mike's slack shoulders. He could get used to this, Harvey decides, safe in the anonymity of a long and uninteresting flight. The last few hours are usually the worst, but this time…

The little old lady who intercepted him earlier reaches across the aisle and nudges him with her cane again.

"It's so good, the way you are with your son," she says softly, beaming, gap-toothed, at Harvey. "My husband was never like that. I knew you were a sweet boy."

Harvey certainly can't explain; it's all he can do just to keep a straight face.

Yes, the last few hours are definitely, *definitely* the worst.

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*Note to self,* Harvey scrawls on the hotel's complimentary stationary pad, *never again indulge base emotions such as affection while on a business trip*. He underlines it again, for good measure, and returns to watching Mike zip around their room like a squirrel on crack.

"We're in *Japan*!" Mike flails, for what feels like the fiftieth time. His nose is plastered to the enormous window that makes up one wall of their suite. Tokyo glitters beneath and around them, red-gold light from the setting sun making the towering buildings dazzle.

"If I'd known back at the office you'd be this impossible, I wouldn't

have brought you along," Harvey says peevishly; *he* didn't have a nice comfortable nap on the plane, because *he* is used to making these trips alone, and just vegging out in his hotel room until it's time to caffeinate himself through dinner.

Mike looks crestfallen at his outburst.

"I was trying to be professional," he says, sounding a bit sulky – which Harvey has absolutely no patience for at the moment. "But, we're not on the clock now, are we? I mean, you didn't make me wear a suit on the plane, so—"

"Not the point," Harvey groans, throwing himself down on the sofa and switching on the television.

"Then what—"

"*Mike.*" Harvey lets his head fall back onto the cushion, past caring about how his hair will look; he left the gel out for the plane trip, he's not putting it back in any time soon. "We have to leave for dinner with Moritaka's people in half an hour. Wash up. Get changed. Leave me alone."

"…yeah. Okay, I'll just—"

"*Leave. Me. Alone.*"

And for once, Mike does exactly as he's told.

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The introductory dinner is a blur of bows and pleasantries and trying to remember to monitor Mike for *faux pas* while Harvey himself isn't exactly operating at full capacity. It's just that, though – an introduction – which is why Harvey is willing to go through with it at all. No major players are there, and almost no business is discussed; that will all happen tomorrow.

What the dinner *is* is a good place to drop Mike headfirst into the world of Japanese business culture, where he can afford to sink a bit before he swims without doing damage that Harvey will have to fix later. Mike makes a favorable enough impression – which is to say, he handles the situation with his usual dearth of subtlety and still manages to drag himself up by the twin bootstraps of being impossibly clever and yet helplessly, genuinely friendly. Harvey is relieved to be able to spend most of the dinner spectating and making polite

nonsense conversation with their hosts.

Even though Harvey and Mike don't stumble out of the restaurant until well after ten p.m., the Tokyo subway is as crowded as a New York rush hour – though here, it's considered only moderate traffic. Harvey parks Mike up against a pole, facing in the direction of the train's motion, and positions himself with one hand around the pole and another wrapped in the plastic ring-handle hanging from the upper railing. It's the most protection he can afford from the thick press of the crowd without being embarrassingly obvious about it.

He may, in fact, still be being embarrassingly obvious about it, but Harvey is too tired to care – and from the look of him, so is Mike. Unfortunately, instead of relaxing and just enduring the ride, Mike seems to be growing increasingly agitated. It doesn't take Harvey long to figure out why.

Japanese subways are…somewhat notorious for the fact that the close, breathless quarters offer more than a few opportunities for an enterprising fellow to cop a feel or ten, disguised as the inevitable result of the train's constant shift and sway. The man staring out the unlit window, his left hand holding the railing and his right brushing repeatedly over the curve of Mike's ass, is *not* one of those. He might as well be, though, given the way Mike is all but squishing himself into Harvey's chest in an effort to escape.

Harvey moves Mike back just a fraction, not pushing him away but giving himself enough space to lean around and tap their fellow commuter on the shoulder.

"*Sumimasen, kedo, watashi no tomodachi ni fukai tsukutteimasu,*" he says softly. The man looks at him oddly, but when Harvey nods meaningfully at the position of his hand, he shifts away – at least as far as he's able – with a murmured apology.

"All taken care of," Harvey tells Mike cheerfully. Mike looks floored.

"What did you say to him?" he demands.

"That I'd break his wrist if he kept touching you," Harvey responds, because it's a hell of a lot more glamorous than, *Excuse me, sir, but you're making my friend uncomfortable.*

The smile he gets for it – just this side of the line between "grateful" and "worshipful" – is more than worth the lie.

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In the morning, Harvey – showered, dressed, shaved, and gelled into his three-piece suit of armor – stands at the side of Mike's bed, sipping a glass of water from the carafe on the night stand and attempting to wake his associate.

"If you don't get up, the hotel staff are really not going to like you," he says. "I mean, *severely* dislike. Hate, even."

"Nnnnnghate*chu*," Mike groans.

"I warned you," Harvey shrugs.

And dumps the carafe on him.

"Holy *Christ*!" Mike leaps out of bed like a scorched cat and shoots Harvey a look like Harvey just dropkicked his puppy. Over a bridge. Into a lava pit.

"Get dressed, we're leaving," Harvey orders. To his surprise – and satisfaction – Mike scrambles into the bathroom and starts the water running before it occurs to him to poke his head back into the room and ask,

"Leaving for where?"

"Before he got into the full-scale resort business, Moritaka's family was heavily involved with the traditional inns in and around Beppu – especially the ones attached to its famous hot springs. That's where he wants to meet us before he'll authorize his man in New York to close the deal, so that's where we're going. Move your ass, our flight leaves in ninety minutes."

"*Flight?!*"

"Yes, flight, do you not read anything I give you?"

"…Hate. You," Mike reiterates – but he moves.

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"Okay," allows Mike. "I might not hate you that much, after all." He's swathed in a green silk robe that should make him look weedy and instead just makes him look slender, flopped out on the soft rush mats that make up the floor of the traditional inn and watching Harvey watch from the open porch for any sign of their nominal hosts.

"Though, I gotta say," he continues, one bare foot waving lazily in the breeze, "this doesn't seem particularly businesslike…at least, not Pearson Hardman type business."

Harvey gives up his vigil and sits down on the floor beside Mike.

"*Hadaka no tsukiai*," he says. Mike blinks.

" 'Open relationship'?" he ventures, then chuckles. "Are you asking me out? Because, really, I think 'it's complicated' would be more accurate —" Harvey interrupts him with a shake of his head.

"A more literal translation would be 'naked association.' It's—" he gropes for a word, unused to explaining himself like this. "There's this idea that if you meet people like this, in an exposed setting, without all the armor they can put on in private, then you'll have…better dealings. A better relationship, better *business*. Because you've seen what's underneath." Harvey's mouth twists sourly, prompting a laugh from Mike.

"Yeah, somehow I can't see that sitting well with you. Hell, you feel exposed if you're not buttoned to the neck in a waistcoat and tie."

"Take it up with René," Harvey grumps, considering retaliation – but there's a discreet scratch at the sliding door of their room, and a soft voice calls,

"Your host has arrived, *okyakusama*, and requests you join him in the Wisteria Room. If you would accompany me…?"

"Lucked out this time, kid," Harvey mutters, just to see Mike grin.

They follow the inn attendant down the winding, rush-floored wooden halls, until they reach a sliding door for all intents and purposes completely indistinguishable from the dozen others they've passed by. The attendant kneels down to pull it open and ushers them inside.

Kazuo Moritaka is not a large man; for that, he has a pair of men who up until a hundred years ago would have been called retainers, or possibly bodyguards. Harvey is surprised by the show of force, but less so than he might have been. Any man who makes his prospective colleagues fly ten-thousand miles around the globe, and another four hours on top of that to get to a specific locaiton entirely of his own choosing, won't be a pushover to close – even, Harvey can admit, for himself.

"Mr. Specter. Mr. Ross." Moritaka bows, Harvey bows, Mike bows, the not-goons bow; there's a lot of bowing, and Harvey suppresses the urge to sigh.

"What do you know about our *onsen*?" Moritaka says suddenly. Sharply.

Harvey blinks – but before he can start wracking his brain for a motive, Mike leans forward.

"*Onsen* just means hot springs, right?" he whispers. Harvey nods tightly and opens his mouth to speak, but Mike beats him to it.

"Beppu's *onsen* have a recorded history of use dating back nearly a thousand years. It boasts nearly three thousand hot spring vents, with a combined output volume of over twenty-seven thousand gallons per minute, second only to Yellowstone National Park in the United States. These vents feed a total of six hundred seventy usable hot springs, representing ten of the eleven classified types of hot spring in Japan. The town itself is divided into eight major thermal districts; this inn is in the Shibaseki district which is best noted for its hot steam bath and woodland trails, and which has also been designated a national health resort." Mike pauses for breath, and glances at Harvey. "I read *everything* you give me," he says quietly.

Fortunately for Harvey's nerves, Moritaka chooses that moment to burst out laughing.

"Interesting," he says happily, gesturing imperiously at another sliding door. Inn staff bustle in, carrying cups and lap-stands and dishes that remind Harvey that it's been a while since lunch. "You and your protegé both, Mr. Specter. If this," he nods at Mike, "is how you respond to all precarious situations, I foresee a long and profitable relationship for both our companies."

Harvey takes a deep breath, disguised as a straightening of his robe.

*Now* they're playing his game.

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"Did you see that?" Mike crows as Harvey slides the door to their room shut. "We were incredible! *I* was incredible—"

"Do we have to have the 'in poor taste' conversation again?" Harvey steps around him and kneels in front of a low chest of drawers. Inside

are two sandalwood bath baskets, complete with towels, soapstone, and a dozen other little amenities to make their soak more enjoyable. Harvey hands one to Mike. "You're not out of the woods yet, kid; it's time for the 'naked' part of 'naked communion.' "

Mike's eyes flick from the towel folded over the top of his basket to Harvey – already stripping out of his robe – and back.

"You're not serious."

"Absolutely." Harvey finishes wrapping his towel around his waist and claps Mike on the shoulder. "Come on, you've been to the club with Louis. I guarantee you, this cannot possibly be worse."

Mike sighs and follows suit, but he keeps his robe on over top.

"I'll take it off when I have to," he says stubbornly, at Harvey's skeptical look. It's not worth it to argue – the hot spring Moritaka has chosen for them is just down the hall – so Harvey shrugs and leads the way.

Another attendant meets them outside the hot spring, to point out the washing facilities and the locking cubbies where they can store their valuables. Harvey turns away to remove his watch as she's reaching for Mike's robe. He's fiddling with the clasp when there's a sudden, startled outburst of Japanese; he whips around to see Mike bright red and clutching his robe tight around his chest, and the attendant looking mortified.

"My sincere apologies, *okyakusama*," she says, bowing low. "I will fetch the manager to explain, please." And flees.

Harvey stares at Mike.

"What the hell happened?"

"I don't know! I think," Mike bites his lip, not relaxing an inch, "I think it might have something to do with my—"

"Never mind, be quiet," Harvey interrupts. He has a sneaking suspicion – a vague memory from the first time Jessica took him on one of these trips – which is confirmed when the manager of the inn arrives and informs them, in the most regretful tone possible, that tattooed persons are strictly banned from the hot spring.

"So have him put a plaster over it." Harvey feigns exasperation. "I've

seen other guests walking around with them." Not at this particular hot spring, admittedly, but bluffing never hurt anyone.

"Our in does not offer that service, *okyakusama*," the manager says, with a hint of reproach. "And even if we did, the design is far too large."

"That's unacceptable," Harvey says flatly. "We're here for business, not pleasure, and I can't conduct my business if I'm hampered by—"

"*Harvey*."

He shoots a glance at Mike – and if he thought the kid was uncomfortable watching him and Jessica argue over the Amylinx case, it's nothing to how miserable he looks now.

Harvey sighs.

"Go back to the room," he says. "I'll get this wrapped up."

And he does. With Mike holed up in their room – probably sulking and feeling sorry for himself, because God knows Harvey's seen him do that; Mike's brilliance makes it easy to forget just how young he is – Harvey has plenty of incentive to ram their closing down Moritaka's throat as fast as he can. With, of course, the charming little smile that means Jessica won't come ream him out for it later locked firmly in place. He's fairly certain Moritaka has no idea what hit him, as Harvey hauls himself out of the hot spring after what must be the most efficient soak in recorded history, but as long as he stays faintly bewildered instead of faintly offended, everything will be golden.

Sure enough, when Harvey gets back, Mike is curled up on his futon with a blanket over his head, pretending to be asleep even though it's barely past eight.

"Stop that," Harvey says, nudging Mike with a gentle toe. Mike's only response is an indeterminate grumble.

Harvey briefly considers attempting to resolve the situation in a manner befitting a Senior Partner at Pearson Hardman.

Then he grins, and thwacks Mike in the face with a pillow.

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It was simply too complicated, Harvey reflects, safely ensconced back

in his New York office. He should have known from the beginning that dragging Mike halfway around the world in order to engineer a chance to look at a four-inch-square patch of his skin was not the course of action of a rational man. If he's going to be honest with himself – and Harvey is only, ever honest with himself, if for no other reason than it makes it much easier to be selectively dishonest with everyone else – what started out as idle curiosity has blossomed into a full-blown obsession. The idea that there are people out there (the tattoo artist, Rachel, *Louis*) who know this thing about Mike, this thing that Harvey cannot for the life of him find out, is starting to drive him just a little insane.

There's only one thing for it. He'll have to – Harvey suppresses a shudder – ask Mike outright if he can look at it

"Donna?" he calls over the intercom.

"I'm not sending another intern out to get you coffee, they have real work to do."

"How about something stronger than coffee?"

"Ohhhh. Finally decided to ask Mike about that tattoo?"

"…you're fired."

Donna just laughs.

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Naturally, once Harvey's made up his mind to talk to Mike, he has no opportunity to do so. He stays late at the office for two weeks straight, trying to catch Mike alone, but apparently his rookie has put the fear of God into his peers; they may have absolutely no chance at getting through an entire conference room of files in a single night, much less remembering any of it afterwards, but damned if they're not going to try. While Jessica will probably be delighted to have a better-than-average crop of survivors to pick partners from, at the moment Harvey is just *irritated*.

Eventually, he has to resort to asking – Alan? Aaron? the annoying one who's always trying to ambush him near Mike's desk – to come in early tomorrow to help him with a case, in order to get him out of the office. And then…it's just him, and Mike, and that impossible, diabolical layer of starched cotton standing between him and Mike's tattoo.

"So," he says, resting his elbows on the top of Mike's cubicle, "got another conference room full of files to get through tonight? Or are you just feeling industrious?"

Mike finishes chugging his Red Bull, dumps the crumpled can into the nearly full (Christ, how has this kid not had a heart attack yet?) trash bag under his desk, and grins tiredly up at Harvey.

"Hundred hours a week, right?" he says, perching his open highlighter behind his ear. "Gotta make a good first impression."

"Believe me, it's far too late for that." Harvey takes away the highlighter and caps it, before a disaster occurs that René would never forgive him for failing to prevent. "And it was a hundred hours a *day*."

"I'm sorry, not all of us can afford Time-Turners, Lord Malfoy."

"Really? Harry Potter, that's what you're going with?"

"If the wand fits…"

"Good God." Harvey shakes his head, giving Mike his best disappointed face. "Clearly the caffeine has scrambled your brain, you'll be completely useless to me now."

"Shut up," Mike laughs, and throws an eraser at him. "Was there something you actually wanted, *my lord*?"

Harvey clears his throat.

"As a matter of fact…yes. I have something to ask you." He straightens his tie, and looks down for a moment. "But I want you to know that you're absolutely not obligated to say 'yes.' "

"…okay?"

"Mostly because I don't want to get slapped with a harassment suit."

Mike suddenly sits up straight.

"So, with that in mind," Harvey continues. "Mike, I was wondering if —"

"Yeah?"

"—just one time, you might—"

"Yeah?"

"—be willing to let me—"

"*Ask*, Harvey!"

"—see your tattoo?"

The anticipation drops off Mike's face like a rock off a cliff.

"That's what you wanted to ask me," he says flatly. Harvey blinks.

"I know it's not exactly an orthodox request," he begins, but Mike shoots to his feet, grabbing his shoulder bag as he shoves past Harvey and out of the cubicle.

"You're a *dick*," he snaps, twisting out of the way when Harvey grabs for his arm. "I'm going home, I'll see you on Monday."

And Harvey is left alone in the office, with only the cleaners and his confusion for company.

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Of course, after over a month of patience and planning, Harvey's in no mood to trip at the finish line. But neither is he in the mood to sit on his ass and wait for whatever headspace Mike has worked himself into to fester over the weekend. So there's really only one path open to him.

"Mike?" Harvey calls, giving the cheap, hollow-core wood of Mike's door a few more solid whacks. "I know you can hear me in there!"

"You're not my boss on Saturday!" Mike yells back. At least he's responding now, which is more than Harvey could say for the first five minutes he was pounding away.

"Want to bet?" Harvey sighs and leans his head against the doorframe. "I just need to talk to you," he says more quietly. He's betting that Mike is right up against the door now, like he would be if he were yelling in Harvey's face. And sure enough—

"God damn it."

There's flurry of curses from the other side of the door, punctuated by the heavy thunk of several locks being wrestled open, and then he's staring at Mike's grumpy face under a tangle of sleep-tousled hair.

"What do you *want*?"

"To apologize."

Mike's jaw drops.

"Who are you and what have you done with my boss?"

"Ah, so I *am* your boss on Saturday," Harvey says triumphantly, slipping past Mike and into the apartment proper. "No, stop, don't get mad again," he adds, as Mike starts to splutter. "We've already finished with that, please."

"Harvey—"

"What did you think I was going to ask you? Last night, when you ran out of the office like a little girl who got her pigtails pulled."

"I didn't – no." Mike cuts himself off with a rough shake of his head. "You want to know? *Fine.*

"I thought you were going to ask me out."

Mike folds his arms over his chest and lifts his chin, defiant. Harvey can't help the sudden swell of pride that rushes through him. He takes a step toward Mike – his jaw tightens, but he doesn't move back – and then another, until he's right up in Mike's personal space, close enough for him to feel the warmth of Mike's body through his thin undershirt.

"That's what you thought?" A growl slips into Harvey's voice; he doesn't make any effort to stop it.

"Yep." Mike is staring straight past Harvey's ear, his back ramrod straight, so he misses the tiny smile that flits over Harvey's face.

"And why would you think a thing like that?"

Now Mike does meet his eyes – and holds them, more than halfway to fury. It takes everything Harvey's learned in a dozen years of playing for the highest stakes in New York City to keep his face blank.

"Because you've been flirting with me for weeks, now. Don't deny it, you're the one who's been teaching me how to *read people*."

"Oh, I'm not denying it." Harvey can feel Mike wanting to look away, but there's no way that's going to happen. "So I'll ask again.

"Mike. Let me see your tattoo?"

He can see the moment understanding dawns on Mike's face. Or – not understanding, but something like it, an inkling powerful enough to make Mike grasp the hem of his shirt in shaking hands and slowly, so slowly it would look like a tease if he weren't on the verge of hyperventilating, pull it over his head. Harvey holds his gaze the entire time, not letting his eyes flick down to the dark swell of ink in the corner of his vision until Mike has discarded the shirt and is staring at him, lips pressed tight as he waits for Harvey's reaction. Only then does Harvey let himself look down at the little patch of skin that's been driving him to disproportionate distraction.

What he sees makes Harvey's breath catch in his throat.

A pair of scales, perfectly balanced, unfurling in a swell of black line art over the whole of Mike's left pectoral. The ink is heavy and dark, almost fresh looking – but the faint beginnings of blur around some of the most intricate lines, and the thin, white line of an old scar interrupting one arm, attest to how long it's been blazoned, stark and beautiful, under Mike's skin.

It's more than he could have ever hoped for.

"When I was in college, it was my dream to be a lawyer," Mike says softly. "After I got kicked out, I *begged* Trevor to lend me the money to get it removed, but he wouldn't do it. I didn't speak to him for almost a month; it was the biggest fight we'd ever had, until—" He stops, and swallows hard.

Harvey can't hold himself back any longer. He crosses the last breath of space between them; lays one palm flat over that perfect, *perfect* ink, cups the other around the back of Mike's head.

"Just for that," Harvey murmurs, "he gets to live."

Mike's lips are dry under his, but they soften quickly, bruising and plumping as Harvey alternately nips at the soft flesh and soothes it with his tongue. His hands slide up Harvey's back, leaving a sear of heat along his spine, and fist in Harvey's hair. It hurts, enough to make Harvey hiss in pain and bite down *hard* – but Mike just groans and clutches at him harder, like if he pulls hard enough he can drag Harvey under his skin, too, and keep him there forever.

It's not nearly as discomfiting a thought as it should be.

Too soon, though, Mike is dragging himself away, just far enough to stare at Harvey with lust-blown pupils.

"Is this a one time thing?" he asks thickly. "Because – that's okay, I can do that, but I need to know—"

Like all of Mike's unbelievable questions, Harvey doesn't even bother to dignify that with an answer.

There are much better ways of getting his point across.

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